

# **TWEENAGE CLICKS**

**THE SOCIAL MEDIA LIVES OF TWEENS AND EARLY TEENS**  
**JULY 2010**

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## THE SOCIAL MEDIA LIVES OF TWEENS AND EARLY TEENS

### What did we do?

Clients often ask us for our take on social media trends amongst young audiences and advice on how best to connect with them. With this in mind, in partnership with The Lounge Group, we conducted a study of social media usage, with Facebook as the focal point, among 11-16 years olds across the UK. For brevity, we've called this age group Tweens. Using a combination of blogs, video uploads, qualitative telephone interviews and street vox pops, we uncovered some fascinating insights into this age group's online behaviour and attitudes towards social media and online brand activity. We've translated these insights into a series of workable guidelines for brands to follow when marketing to this age group.



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### **Insight #1: Facebook Pages/Groups help Tweens express their fast-changing identity**

Of all their online activities, it is social networking sites where this age group are spending the vast majority of their time.

Even those under 13 are entering false dates of birth in order to create a profile. Facebook is by far the most popular site used, because “everybody has it”.

Although secondary sites such as Bebo (soon to close), MySpace (decreasingly so) or Twitter (increasingly so) are used, Facebook is the hub. YouTube is also hugely popular, but has a different, less rounded offering, with many simply embedding YouTube videos or links into Facebook Pages.

For Twitter, pop sensations like Justin Bieber have proven a tipping point for Tweenage adoption. Twitter has been battling to stop Bieber tweets dominating “trending”; the Tweens have been fighting back, however, by changing his name to Twieber and Jieber and continuing the conversation thereafter! But despite the growth in usage, Twitter has yet to reach its full potential and the relative complexity of Facebook provides greater opportunity for brands.

Of particular focus to brands when thinking about Facebook should be the millions of Pages and Groups available to ‘like’ or join. Tweenage years find individuals in a state of flux; they are rapidly and continually testing and changing their identity. Facebook ‘Pages’ and ‘Groups’ allow them to share information and therefore express their evolving identities. Tweens have control over very few things in their lives, yet how they express their identity via social media is an exception to that rule, and something this generation of Tweens is first to experience.

From a functional perspective, liking/joining Pages/Groups enables Tweens to stay in touch and up to date with their favourite brands/products/bands etc.

“I’m addicted to joining Groups. I’m on Pages for Jason Derulo, Samsung, The Saturdays, iPhone (and I haven’t even got one yet), Crunchie Bars, Lindor, New Look and River Island; loads of others. It’s how I stay in touch. Things like new launches, sales offers, discounts – I get to hear about it all.” (Female, 13 years old)

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### Insight #1: Facebook Pages/Groups help Tweens express their fast-changing identity (continued)

“I signed up to a Nike fan Page, then an Adidas one, then a PlayStation one. Why not? My friends will probably sign up to them, too, so I’ll try to be first. Do I care what the Pages give me? Yeah, I do. It’s really nice to have new stuff appearing on your profile page.” (Male, 12 years old)

But there are powerful emotional benefits too. Liking/joining a Page/Group is communicated to your Facebook network via your newsfeed and Facebook profile. This moulds and enhances a Tween’s online image, demonstrating to their peers that they are in touch and in the know. It’s a badge of identity, signifying their allegiance to a social group.

For brands, the benefits are clear. Tweens are hungry to add myriad Pages/Groups to their profile, word is then spread among large peer networks, greatly increasing exposure to the brand.

#### TOP TIPS FOR BRANDS:

- Having a number of Facebook Pages/Groups is a must – an overall brand Page/Group, but also individual product Pages/Groups. (If you’re really lucky, consumers will create their own Groups on your brand/products – you can interact with Group members here, but don’t try to dictate what is and isn’t said as this is social media suicide)
- Ensure you nurture your Groups/Pages, keeping them up to date and developing a relationship with members; Tweens demonstrate a more voracious appetite and greater need for new content than older audiences
- Implement Facebook’s social plugins:
  - o Add the ‘Like’ button to your website(s). This new functionality from Facebook will potentially give brands a social media presence across all web spaces
  - o Look out for ‘Recommend’ and ‘Activity Feed’ – new plugins from Facebook which will increase the opportunities for online influencers to act as brand advocates
  - o Use a company such as AdNectar to enable members of your Groups/Pages to give branded virtual gifts to their friends

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### **Insight #2: Content which informs or entertains offers social currency to Tweens**

As stated in Insight #1, Tweens have a voracious appetite for viewing and sharing online content. We delved deeper to understand why this is and how it works.

#### **The sharer – why pass content on?**

A significant motivation for sharing content is receiving feedback from peers – an important source of validation for this young age group – so only content deemed to be ‘good’ will be passed on. Sharing the right content boosts a Tweens’ online social standing – arguably to an even greater degree than liking/joining Pages/Groups. It positions a Tween as cool and in the know, or even as helpful – some report altruistically sharing particular content with specific friends whom they know will benefit from it. But more than all of this, sharing good content is fun: it stimulates endless funny chat, both on- and offline; it amuses and fills the time.

“I do this a lot but usually with statuses, quiz results and application notifications and not as much with photos. I like doing this as people can know all about what I've been doing and how I am feeling.” (Female, 11 years old)

“Yes, I do look for funny stuff. I always look on YouTube and I have my own YouTube account where I upload my own videos and send the videos to friends. I normally add a funny video on to my Facebook profile so that all my friends can see it” (Male, 14 years old)

#### **The receiver – what impact does this have?**

Consistent with findings from other studies, we found peer influence to be hugely significant among 11-16 year olds. This applies to online content – friends were our Tweens’ most trusted sources for quality, likeable content and information – they have faith that if a friend thinks a piece of content is worth sharing, then it will be good.

“If a friend sends me a link I always look at it, as if they think it’s good I will too.” (Male, 14 years old)

“I would always click on a link that a friend had sent me.” (Male, 12 years old)

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### **Insight #2: Content which informs or entertains offers social currency to Tweens (continued)**

This creates clear potential for brands to increase awareness and, importantly, credibility through the provision of shareable branded content. However, all this will only work if the content is right.

#### **The content – what makes content shareable?**

For Tweens, content must either inform or entertain; content which fails to meet these needs will simply be lost in the ether.

Informative content can inform the Tween about the brand – this could be details of special offers, sales or competitions, opinions or reviews of products, music etc.

But the brand or product doesn't have to be the subject matter. Tweens are generally accepting of news and information being delivered by brands rather than via conventional media channels like the BBC – provided it is a brand they trust. So for Tweens, brands needn't just provide news on themselves, they can increase their utility to Tweens by bringing news from other areas of interest. This creates a clear point of difference between Tweens and adults, who are suspicious and sceptical of 'branded' news.

“Red Bull do so much stuff that is right. There's always loads of stuff coming from them whereas some brands seem really slow and lazy. Friends will send me Red Bull snowboarding videos and if my friends like them I probably will too. I also joined the Red Bull Music Academy fan Page, because I love music and I'm really interested in their academy idea.” (Male, 15 years old)

Creating content that will entertain a Tween audience is a trickier task, as what is considered fun/humorous is highly subjective. However, our research has helped us identify some good starting points.

Tweens are avid consumers of videos on YouTube and other video sharing sites like break.com, so video content, particularly with music, works well. Our Tweens listed an array of entertaining content – from funny to cute to gross.

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### Insight #2: Content which informs or entertains offers social currency to Tweens (continued)

“I like funny pop covers videos and those funny animal pictures you get, I always pass those on to my friends.” (Female, 13 years old)

“Funny videos on YouTube – things like Jackass, funny animals and funny music videos” (Female, 14 years old)

#### Taking content further

Providing content which either informs or entertains Tweens or, better still, does both, is the first and essential step to producing shareable content. However, in order to achieve standout, more can and should be done.

This age group is generally resistant to more traditional methods of advertising: it takes more effort to impress the typical Tween. They are at a highly exploratory stage in their life and love to experience new things, so brands that can facilitate this are likely to make more impact. The four Es of the new marketing model – emotions, experiences, engagement and exclusivity – work exceptionally well for a Tween audience and content that taps into some or all of these has a far higher chance of being passed on.

#### How much, how often?

Tweens spend a lot of time online. Most report spending from around half an hour to an incredible five hours a day on social networking sites alone, with girls spending slightly longer than boys. While much of this time is spent socialising, chatting etc, a significant proportion is spent consuming different forms of content. The Tweens we spoke to are expert multi-taskers, adept at quickly viewing and filtering the vast quantities of information they face as a result of having huge numbers of online friends, and joining a multitude of Pages and Groups. Thus, they are accustomed to consuming a great deal of content – an expectation that brands would do well to meet.

#### TOP TIPS FOR BRANDS:

- Make content easy to pass on – add the ‘Share’ button to branded content

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### Insight #2: Content which informs or entertains offers social currency to Tweens (continued)

- Ensure content informs or entertains - explore what 'news' they're most interested in, make sure it is also relevant to the brand and invest in an ongoing programme of informative and entertaining content in this area
- Become a destination for finding out about a specific topic/theme; have an 'angle' to create a reason to be that destination
- Improve content further by following some or all of the four Es: emotions, experiences, engagement, exclusivity
- Always keep in mind the benefits that the Tween will reap from sharing your content – is it sufficiently funny / useful / cool to improve their social standing, OR simply be fun to share?
- Supply sufficient content – less is rarely more with Tween audiences

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### Insight #3: Sharers and influencers bring the most value to brands

As with adults, Tweens exhibit a variety of different types of social network user, ranging from highly active to passive:

1. **DIY Directors:** The most active create and post their own content – they might write their own blog or create and post humorous videos

“I normally send funny stuff, mostly the videos that I do on YouTube. I send them to make them laugh” (Male, 14 years old)

2. **Buzz Hunters:** Some Tweens actively surf the web for good content to pass on – for the amusement of both themselves and their online friends

3. **Passive Publishers:** Others simply view and forward content they’ve been sent, but play little role in seeking out good content

“We send stuff to each other but I don’t bother searching for stuff by myself.” (Male, 14 years old)

4. **Schoolyard Sharers:** The least active only look at content others have shared.

“I like looking at things my friends have posted on Facebook. Or sometimes they tell me about funny stuff on the phone or at school and I look it up. But I don’t really pass it on.” (Female, 11 years old)

Though Group 4 may seem of limited interest to brands, they will still chat online, by phone or face-to-face about content that has captured their imagination – so word of mouth can still be harnessed through the provision of shareable branded content.

However, it makes most sense for brands to target the first three groups, as they are all ‘sharers’.

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### Insight #3: Sharers and influencers bring the most value to brands (continued)

Another important characteristic is influence. More active sharers tend to wield a greater degree of influence over their peers (influencers); however, this is not a hard-and-fast rule and there is a spectrum of influence level within each group.

Being a sharer and an influencer is a powerful combination. Successfully targeting one Tween with both characteristics is likely to bring the same value to a brand as targeting multiple non-sharers or non-influencers.

“I would always follow the links that my friends send me as they like the same things that I do. Like the adidas Originals stuff we’ve all been passing around.” (Male, 13 years old)

#### Targeting sharer-influencers

It’s accepted that Tweens turn to their peers for recommendations; thus those Tweens who are well informed (something which Pages allow for) are perfectly placed to influence those around them.

- A good place to start is to find Tweens who are members of a great many Pages and Groups
- Also those with large networks (i.e. more Facebook friends)

#### TOP TIPS FOR BRANDS:

- Develop a set of metrics that define which Tweens are sharer-influencers in your sector or category
- Similarly, develop an understanding of the utility or entertainment which the audience deems a good fit with your brand; i.e, the shape and form of brand permission
- Ensure sharer-influencers develop a sense of a vested interest in your brand

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### Insight #4: Location-based social media services have huge potential for this audience

The majority of respondents thought location-based social media/services were of great practical use, for example, for finding places such as newsagents, shopping centres or cinemas, or for finding their way if lost.

“To find the nearest shop or bar” (Male, 14 years old)

“If you’re meeting up with friends and they had a GPS you could find them easily.” (Male, 14 years old)

“It could also be used if you have invited a friend over, and they get lost or don’t know where they are to find them and guide them to where they want to be.” (Female, 13 years old)

But they could also see the potential for more playful or whimsical applications:

“You could set a point and you and your friends had to race to meet there”. (Male, 14 years old)

“To track spaceships, asteroids and meteorites.” (Male, 12 years old)

The third prominent theme amongst many suggestions was increasing or maintaining safety and security, a clear concern amongst this young age group:

“If you need help you could use GPS on your mobile and send a distress signal to the police and they would have your exact location.” (Male, 14 years old)

“To track down missing pets.” (Male, 14 years old)

Though the picture is positive for the most part, a minority lack confidence in the accuracy and thus reliability of location-based services. Brands would need to provide assurance of its accuracy in its communication with this audience.

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### **Insight #4: Location-based social media services have huge potential for this audience (continued)**

Some Tweens criticised the dependence of location-based services on the internet, making cost and reliance on internet connection two key barriers. However, Tweens are increasingly accessing the internet via their mobiles, and network provider packages are only likely to improve in terms of value for money as they push to migrate all users online.

Service providers perhaps aren't yet packaging and communicating location-based services in a way that works for Tweens. Rather than conveying any sense of 'invasion of privacy', they should communicate first and foremost the practical and fun (and to a lesser degree, safety-related) benefits that location-based services can provide.

#### **TOP TIPS FOR BRANDS:**

- Facebook are set to roll out location-based status updates, allowing brands to target consumers with geographically relevant marketing. Time for brands to get their thinking caps on and devise strategies which work for them
- Tweens are fascinated by the idea of 'treasure hunt' format and other games which apply location-based technology
- Though currently favoured by an older audience, the location-based social media service FourSquare is sure to gain greater traction with younger audiences. Check out their rewards system for good ideas

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### Insight #5: Tweens as brand ambassadors

The research showed that there is a role to play for brand ambassadors among the Tween audience, but marketers need to consider their approach carefully and intelligently.

Initially for Tweens, the advantage of becoming a brand ambassador seems quite clear and simplistic. They see it as a straightforward task and an easy way for them to make money. However, brands need to be conscious that there is still an undercurrent of ill feeling towards the idea. At the extreme end, the issue of exploiting people 'under age' is mentioned, but generally it seems to be more about not wanting to be considered an annoyance to their friends. While it might be easy to make money/win rewards, for a Tween there is also the risk of spoiling relationships they've developed by introducing content to friends that they do not want to see.

“Unless it's exactly right, it would be annoying to be on the receiving end.” (Female, 13 years old)

For some Tweens, the concept lacked credibility – they were sceptical about whether they really could make money and be employed in this way. Though theoretically a Tween is more than capable of using social media and sharing content, some, acutely aware of their young age, feel they would be unable to communicate the message of the brand in the intended way. Clearly brands should select their brand ambassadors with the utmost care and reassure any who seem doubtful of the concept.

An important way effectively to engage Tweens as brand ambassadors is to ensure they are provided with content they genuinely care about. Even at the most basic level, a brand ambassador should feel comfortable enough to share the content within his or her peer group. However, utilising one of the four Es, in this case 'exclusivity', will help accelerate the sharing process. Giving a Tween exclusive content that's not immediately available to their friends will naturally encourage them to pass it on.

“I don't mind if my friends send me stuff from brands. I think it must be hard for brands to get out to people so social networking sites are a good way to reach us. I think it could be fun to spread the message of a brand.” (Male, 13 years old)

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### Insight #5: Tweens as brand ambassadors (continued)

#### TOP TIPS FOR BRANDS:

- Always ensure you are recruiting Tweens who have a genuine interest in the brand/product you want them to represent
- Develop a robust screening process to ensure you are connecting with influencers
- Arm your ambassadors with exclusive content – make them want to share among their peers, rather than feel they have to; make it low-effort!
- Put the online functionality in place to make it easy for your ambassadors to share content with their peers
- Maintain a regular conversation with your brand ambassadors – ensure they feel part of the team
- Ensure there's no 'small print' or 'catches' to put off your potential ambassadors

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### Insight #6: Using the influence of celebrity

“I do look for funny stuff on the internet. I like things that have someone well known on them”  
(Male, 12 years old)

Using celebrities to reach a Tween audience can be an effective means of communication. However, Tweens will not blindly follow anyone and can be sceptical over the choices made by brands in this area. Tweens have no issue with celebrities endorsing brands per se, or in them doing so via social media; but it takes a lot – more than many might expect of such a young audience – to get Tweens to commit to a celebrity.

It is often said that Tweens are very fickle, but their fickle nature is closely linked to their relative lack of confidence. Tweens are at a difficult point in life where they are trying to negotiate the rules of what’s cool and what’s not.

Teenage celebrities represent a period of life that the Tweens will soon be entering. Their forthcoming late teenage years, while exciting, can also be quite frightening. Celebrities such as Justin Beiber, Miley Cyrus and the Jonas Brothers show the happier, positive side of being a teenager, and this often inspires Tweens – more so females than males.

Despite the recent boom in teenage celebrities and the reasons outlined for their success, brands don’t (and shouldn’t) have to rely solely on the teenage angle. Overall, Tweens are looking for direction and inspiration. This means that sports personalities, musicians and anyone with a success story that Tweens can relate to still have a part to play. For brands using celebrities, it is about creating a narrative that young people can identify with, and placing the celebrity as the fulcrum of this identifiable story.

“Sometimes with celebrities it all seems a bit plastic when they’re promoting something. I like it when it feels more like a story, and it all moves along in a way which is funny or exciting or inspiring.” (Female, 15 years old)

#### TOP TIPS FOR BRANDS:

- Don’t expect them to follow any old ‘celebrity’. Pick someone who inspires them, and ensure there’s a good fit between your brand, your intended audience and the celebrity you work with
- Pay attention to the narrative. Ensure there’s an entertaining dynamic at play in terms of how you work with your celebrity. Make sure that a story unfolds



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### Facebook Pages: Case Studies

Here are some examples of brands that are leading the way in terms of developing engaging and effective Facebook strategies...

#### Coca Cola

The Coca Cola Page is the epitome of user-generated content, demonstrating the success that this can bring to your brand. The Page is largely powered by the users, on all levels from allowing their content to be displayed on the regular wall post feed to more detailed applications such as the 'fan highlights' section.

Coca Cola's success is also in recognising that Facebook should not be just about advertising your latest product – and that the bigger opportunity for them is to remind us of the iconic status Coca Cola has. As such, their photo albums are full of nostalgic Coke product or adverts, product from around the world and even pictures of their workers.

More interesting, and perhaps the best example of how committed the brand is to the fans, is the story of how the fan Page came about. Unlike other successful fan Pages, Coca Cola's originates from two genuine fans. Instead of seeing this as 'unofficial' or as some form of threat to the brand, they decided to work with the fans and continue to build from the successful connections they had made.

#### adidas

adidas stands out in the way it utilises its Page's tools to promote advertising campaigns and promote its other social media activity. A good example of its use of tools is the 'Your area' tab, which creates a localised stream of news, videos, photos and competitions for the fans.

Competitions are also something that adidas deploys effectively: firstly, in picking prizes and partnerships that resonate with its fans, but, cleverly, it also makes sure it follows up and documents the results of competitions when they have finished. Using photos, videos and blog posts allows adidas to gain extra mileage from a campaign that otherwise might have made minimal noise. More important still, it demonstrates a high level of commitment to its fans, keeping them engaged at all stages.

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### Facebook Pages: Case Studies (continued)

#### Topshop

In addition to having all the usual attributes of a strong Facebook Page – engaged fans, a branded application and good notes – Topshop’s one demonstrates a perfect understanding of the role of content for young people: it must either inform or entertain.

When featuring a product like make-up, which is designated its own tab, Topshop will upload instructional videos demonstrating to the fans how to get the best from the product. Pairing up the creative advertising with relevant and informative content helps mobilise the fans and gives the Page a sense of usefulness.

#### Red Bull

The strength in Red Bull’s Page stems from its integration with other social media channels. Through this integration, Red Bull manages to make its Page feel genuinely different from other brands’ Pages.

The best example of this is its ‘athletes’ tab. Within this tab is a collection of Twitter streams from Red Bull-associated athletes. So fans can read tweets from popular skateboarders or snowboarders, crossing between two different social media channels as they do so.

#### Pringles

A key component in a successful Facebook Page is knowing – really knowing – your audience.

Pringles has recognised the content its audience enjoys and realised that if this content is carefully delivered it will increase the chance of fans ‘sharing’ it. Essentially, Pringles has found a method of delivering their content virally.

In recognising that its Facebook fans, and the broader Facebook community, like to pass on humorous content, Pringles created short, low-budget funny videos for its Page. It has given users a low-risk, high-reward chance to spread the Pringles brand to their friends without resorting to paid ad placements.

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### Facebook Pages: Case Studies (continued)

#### TOP TIPS FOR BRANDS:

- Ensure your Page is delivering regular content. Allowing user-generated content will not only make this process easier, but create a greater feel of engagement with the fan base
- Maximise your competitions and/or campaign initiatives. If you're running a competition, ensure it's about more than just picking a winner and delivering a prize. Even if they are simply winning some clothes, see if they can upload a picture of themselves wearing them. Not only are you engaging with one of your fans, you are also increasing the chance of their friends joining your Page so they can see their friend and comment, too
- Be useful. You want your Facebook Page to be a space that people can use. In doing so you'll increase the chances of people recommending it. So offer advice, tips and information about your brand or product. Ideally, deliver this advice in a creative way (e.g. the Topshop videos)
- Integrate your communication channels. Your Facebook Page shouldn't feel closed off. Introduce your fans to any other social media sites you are using
- Understand your audience and what content they want. If you understand what content your fans want, you will increase the chances of their using it. And if they are using it, there's more chance of them sharing it with others